

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 RABAT 06576 020904Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3783
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 6576

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, MO
SUBJ: NEW MOROCCAN PARLIAMENT GETS DOWN TO BUSINESS

REF: RABAT 5736

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: MOROCCO'S FIRST PARLIAMENT SINCE 1970, HAVING FOCUSSED ON HOUSEKEEPING CHORES SINCE ITS INAUGURATION ON OCTOBER 14, HAS NOW DEALT WITH ITS FIRST SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE. PRIME MINISTER OSMAN PRESENTED THE GENERAL LINES OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM TO THE UNICAMERAL BODY ON NOVEMBER 10. THE DEPUTIES THEN COMMENTED ON THE PROGRAM AND THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED ON NOVEMBER 30.

2. PARTY DISCIPLINE HAS HELD UP WELL, EVEN AMONG THE AMORPHOUS INDEPENDENTS, AND ISTIQLAL AND POPULAR MOVEMENT(MP) -- THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY WINNERS PARTICIPATING IN THE GOVERNMENT -- HAVE SO FAR SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITIONS. THE MINORITY -- PRIMARILY THE SOCIALIST UNION OF POPULAR FORCES (USFP) HAS SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMS IN DEBATES. ALL OF THE PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING THE LEFT, HAVE EXPRESSED CAUTIOUS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 RABAT 06576 020904Z

OPTIMISM THAT THIS LATEST EXPERIENCE IN CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IS OFF TO A POSITIVE START WITH ALL OF THE PLAYERS TAKING IT SERIOUSLY. ALONG WITH RELAXATION OF PRESS CONTROLS, SOME PROGRESS ON POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND POLITICAL PARTY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME HOPEFUL GAINS
FOR THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOROCCO, END SUMMARY

3. MOROCCO'S LONG-AWAITED PARLIAMENT, INAUGURATED BY KING HASSAN ON OCTOBER 14 (REFTEL), IS NOW IN FULL SWING AND AN INCIPIENT DIALOGUE IS UNDERWAY WITH THE GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH THE U.S. CONGRESS WAS UNABLE TO SEND A DELEGATION TO THE OPENING, HOUSE SPEAKER O'NEILL DID SEND A MESSAGE OF GREETING TO THE SPEAKER.

4. THE PARLIAMENT'S RULES OF ORDER WERE HAMMERED OUT AFTER LENGTHY DEBATE. UNDER THE RULES, ALL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES EXCEPT MINISTERS MUST RESIGN FROM PREVIOUS FUNCTIONS IN ORDER TO SERVE IN PARLIAMENT. (OF THE 30 GOVERNMENT MINISTER, 17 ARE ALSO DEPUTIES.) THE PARLIAMENT ALSO CHOSE ITS OFFICERS: PRESIDENT OULD DEY SIDI BABA, 8 VICE PRESIDENTS AND 11 SECRETARIES. NEXT CAME ELECTIONS TO THE 13 COMMITTEES. ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING THE LEFT, HOLD AT LEAST ONE VICE PRESIDENCY AND HEAD AT LEAST ONE COMMITTEE, WITH THE MAJORITY INDEPENDENTS HOLDING THE MOST POSTS. A SAHARAN IS ONE OF THE VPS. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE IS AN INDEPENDENT FROM KENTIRA, ABDELHAMID KACIMI. PARLIAMENT ALSO CHOSE FROM ITS MEMBERSHIP PERSONS TO SIT ON THE SPECIAL COURT AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHAMBER, AS PROVIDED IN CHAPTERS 7 AND 10 OF THE CONSTITUTION.

5. DEBATES ON BOTH PROCEDURES AND SUBSTANCE HAVE BEEN LIVELY. THE SESSIONS, WHICH ARE DUE TO LAST INTO LATE DECEMBER, ARE COVERED BY TELEVISION FILMING CREWS AND THE PRESS, ALL OF WHICH GIVE DETAILED ACCOUNTS OF THE DEBATES. ATTENDANCE HAS THUS FAR

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 RABAT 06576 020904Z

BEEN GOOD. REPORTEDLY, 21 PCT OF THE DEPUTIES ARE ILLITERATE.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER, IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 59 OF THE CONSTITUTION, PRESENTED AN OUTLINE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM FOR THE COMING YEAR ON NOVEMBER 10. THE DEPUTIES TOOK NEARLY THREE WEEKS IN COMMENTING ON IT, WITH MOST TOUCHING ON CONSTITUENCY AND/OR PARTY INTERESTS. AT THE END, BOTH ISTIQLAL AND MP FORMALLY ENDORSED THE PROGRAM, ALTHOUGH ISTIQLAL DEPUTIES SHOWED RESERVE ON A NUMBER OF POINTS. USFP DEPUTIES, PROCLAIMING THEMSELVES TO BE IN "CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION," STRONGLY ATTACKED A NUMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POINTS AND DISASSOCIATED THE PARTY FROM THE PROGRAM, CALLING IT CAPITALIST-BASED. AS NO VOTE OF CONFIDENCE WAS CALLED FOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, THE PRIME MINISTER IN ANSWERING THE DEPUTIES ON NOVEMBER 30 SUGGESTED THEY RESERVE THEIR DETAILED CRITICISMS FOR THE UPCOMING DEBATES OVER NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET, WHEN THEY WOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERPELLATE RESPONSIBLE MINISTERS. THE PRIME MINISTER CALLED FOR CONTINUING DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT. HE ALSO STRESSED THE NEED TO PRESERVE MOROCCO'S TRADITIONS AND FOR ALL ELEMENTS OF PARLIAMENT TO SUBORDINATE MINOR DIFFERENCES IN ORDER TO FACE UP TO EXTERNAL THREATS.

7. FOLLOWING THE BUDGET DEBATES, THERE MAY BE SOME PRELIMINARY HEARINGS ON THE FIVE YEAR PLAN, ALTHOUGH THE DOCUMENT IS UNLIKELY TO BE PRESENTED AND/OR STUDIED IN DEPTH UNTIL THE PARLIAMENT'S SPRING SESSION NEXT APRIL. THE KING IS ALSO EXPECTED TO SUBMIT TO PARLIAMENT FOR PRO FORMA APPROVAL THE MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY WITH MAURITANIA.

8. COMMENT: WE CONTINUE TO HEAR FROM THE FULL RANGE OF POLITICAL ELEMENTS IN PARLIAMENT THAT THE SESSION HAS THUS FAR GONE AS WELL AS ANYONE COULD HAVE HOPED. WHILE THE LEFT OPPOSITION COMPLAINS THAT THE PACE OF SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS COULD BE GREATLY ACCELERATED, IT NEVERTHELESS FEELS THAT DEBATE HAS BEEN ORDERLY AND THAT IT HAS BEEN ABLE TO EXPRESS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 RABAT 06576 020904Z

ITS POSITIONS. BOTH THE USFP AND THE SINGLE DEPUTY OF THE PARTY OF PROGRESS AND SOCIALISM (COMMUNIST) HAVE BEEN AT PAINS TO TAKE A RESPONSIBLE, STATEMAN-LIKE APPROACH TO THEIR OPPOSITION ROLE. THE ISTIQLAL, WHICH HAD BEEN IN OPPOSITION SINCE 1963 BEFORE JOINING THE OCTOBER 10 GOVERNMENT, IS UNDERSTANDABLY EVEN MORE UPBEAT. A NUMBER OF ITS OFFICIALS HAVE IN PRIVATE WARMLY PRAISED THE SERIOUSNESS OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY TO DATE AND CITED A GROWING BELIEF THAT THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION NOW IN TRAIN MAY WELL BE "IRREVERSIBLE."

9. WE WILL OF COURSE BE IN A MUCH BETTER POSITION TO JUDGE THE PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE AFTER THE BODY HAS BEEN AT WORK ON SUBSTANCE FOR A WHILE LONGER. IT WILL BE ESPECIALLY SIGNIFICANT TO SEE WHAT EXTENT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE INFLUENCES GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES. THE UPCOMING BUDGET DEBATE, DUE BEFORE THE CLOSE OF THIS SESSION, AND THE DEBATE ON THE NEW FIVE-YEAR PLAN, PRESUMABLY DURING THE SPRING 1978 SESSION, SHOULD BE INSTRUCTIVE IN THIS REGARD. NEVERTHELESS, THE CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER STEPS -- LIFTING OF PRESS CENSORSHIP LAST MARCH, RECENT RELEASES AND AMNESTIES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND ACTIVE POLITICAL PARTY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT -- THE NEW PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE ALREADY POINTS TOWARD INCIPENT BUT HOPEFUL GAINS FOR THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOROCCO.
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